

A Study  
on Pascal.

*John Gamble.*

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# A STUDY ON PASCAL.

*THREE LECTURES*

BY

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1907:

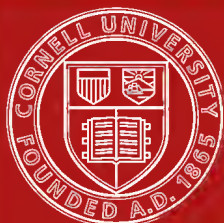
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# **1. The Life of Pascal.**



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## THE LIFE OF PASCAL.

WE read that an inquirer once put to Jesus the fundamental question, *Are there few that be saved?*—and that His only answer was to put aside the query and turn the thoughts of the questioner to his own undeniable duty: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

To the question which the Lord thus left unanswered, His Church has not given any distinct and authoritative reply. Particular teachers have arisen from time to time who have returned a direct answer, but we shall not find in the formulas either of the Church of Rome or the Church of England any statements which lift the question out of the obscurity in which Jesus left it.

Although, however, the Church in her corporate capacity has thus kept silent, we can see the reappearance

in different ages of two radically different conceptions of the scope of salvation. Sometimes the way of salvation has been pictured as a narrow, and sometimes as a broad way. Access to it has been thought of as easy, attainable without serious sacrifice by ordinary men, or again as difficult and actually found by only a few. The arms of the crucified Saviour have been represented now as opened wide, and now as able to receive but a small number within their sheltering embrace.

The two views, when they are examined, are seen to have each its own necessary antecedents and also its own practical consequences. To believe that the way of salvation is narrow, is to believe in the depravity of the human heart. This belief leads us back to an original fall of man in which the whole human race was involved. Nor can we stop here. We are compelled to pass behind the Fall to the Divine Counsels in which it was decreed or sanctioned. Thus we are driven ultimately to the conclusion that man is not a free agent, that he is predestined to weal or woe, and that he cannot stand upright without the Divine assistance.

On the other hand, the disciples of the broad way believe in the natural goodness of the human heart. They

minimize the consequences of the Fall of which they read on the page of inspiration. Their minds recoil from the predestination by the Most High of any of His creatures to sin and misery, and they believe that man can, if he so will, at every moment choose the right. They may hope that many to whom the name of the Redeemer is unknown may be among the saved, and they may even anticipate the ultimate happiness of the whole human race.

But it is in their attitude towards the practical conduct of life that the representatives of the two opinions differ most markedly. While those on the one side are ready to tolerate many compliances with the customs and fashions of the world, and to accept from men a very general fulfilment of the demands of Christ, their opponents separate the Church from the society around it by the sharpest line of division. The separation may take the form of monasticism, an ascetic warfare against the flesh, or it may take the form given to it by Calvin in Geneva. In either case the Church is as effectually separated from the great world around it as it was when that world was not Christian even in name. Thus on both sides there are dangers. The disciples of the broad way run the risk of confounding the Church with the

world, of destroying the savour of the purifying salt, of depriving the leaven of its virtue. Their antagonists have often alienated the world by demands which are too severe for human nature.

While the Church Catholic has never pronounced authoritatively in favour of either view, and thus both are compatible with loyalty to her obedience, in theory she has upheld the more severe opinion, and repudiated those who at different times would have committed her definitely to the broad way. One such attempt is associated with the great name of Origen, who combined a fondness for heathen wisdom and an admiration of heathen virtue, with a dread of the flesh and a desire to subdue it by forcible means. Another effort to secure the same result was that of Pelagius, who virtually denied the existence of original sin. The mind of a new-born child was in his view as a blank page, equally open to receive any kind of writing. There was no antecedent influence biassing the will towards evil. Acts well-pleasing to God might at any moment be done by all men alike.

These doctrines aroused the antagonism of the great teacher whose name is the symbol for everything that is

severe in Christianity—of Augustine. Although it may not be possible to extract from his writings any distinct declaration that the saved will be few in number, or that the disciples of the Crucified form more than a small minority in any generation, there can be no doubt that these are the conclusions to which his writings point. And although the pre-Reformation Church may not have formally adopted all the implications of the Augustinian teaching, she yet endorsed this teaching as a whole with her emphatic approval, and she has ever ascribed to Augustine an authority second only to that of S. Paul.

The question thus raised, although it may appear at first sight to belong to abstract theology, is really fundamental and intensely practical. It is a question at once of belief and of conduct. Upon the view we take our practical interpretation of both the two great commandments will depend. Happily the majority of men are under no obligation to face these tremendous alternatives. We rightly devote our energies to the fulfilment of present duty, which is generally unmistakable. But from time to time there arise those to whom these profound questions are as near and as urgent as

the practical conduct of life is to ordinary men. And although we may not think of accepting all their conclusions, still less of making the conduct in which these conclusions issued a model for our own imitation, yet their thoughts and their lives remain in the highest degree fruitful and stimulating. If it were not for such the history of the Church would be as a pool of stagnant water.

In the first half of the 17th century, and in the midst of French Catholicism, the great problem of which I have spoken was once again forced upon the attention of men. During the preceding century the French nation, if it thought at all of religion, can hardly have thought of it except as a source of strife and an occasion of bloodshed. Now that the wars of religion had ceased, and the Reformation been virtually effaced from the land, thought began once more upon the practical claims of religion and upon its intellectual problems. The period was marked by the reformation of many existing monastic houses and by the foundation of several new orders. It embraced a large part of the working life of two men whose names are held in the highest honour by the French Church. S. Francis of Sales, some of whose devotional



writings are believed to have attained at the time of his death to a more widespread diffusion than any religious book since the *Imitation*, died in 1620. S. Vincent of Paul, of whom it has been said that he could console himself on his death-bed by the thought of having mitigated the sufferings of a larger number of his fellows than any one then living, died at an advanced age in 1660.

Thus these fifty years are marked by numberless tokens as a period when religion was not only a matter of widespread intellectual interest, but was also made the motive of a renewal of life and of an active charity. It is not wonderful that in such an age repeated efforts should have been made to reconcile the operations of Divine Grace with the freedom of the human will, and so to answer the fundamental question, Was the mixed multitude of professing Christians on the way of salvation? or was it only a few who were actually treading this uphill path?

These were the issues really in debate in the controversies regarding Grace. The sterner view was vehemently upheld by the Dominican Order, whose great doctor, Thomas Aquinas, held closely to the Augustinian

teaching. The opposition came principally from the Jesuits, who must be regarded in this matter as innovators and assailants of the established tradition.

Rome was appealed to for an authoritative decision. We hear of eighty-two Convocations held on the subject in the eternal city between 1596 and 1607. The Papacy was placed in a most difficult situation. If it decided in favour of the Jesuits, it repudiated Augustine and allowed the Protestants to count this great luminary as one of themselves. If it decided against them, it was disbanding the *élite* of its army in the presence of the enemy. Ultimately Rome refused to pronounce, and on August 29th, 1607, the discussion was indefinitely adjourned. "Grave and novel incident," comments the French historian, "this abdication of responsibility in the presence of so fundamental a question!" \*

Perplexed by this uncertainty, two friends undertook to repair the Church's omission, and to expose to view the mind of the great teacher to whom all alike appealed. One of these was of Flemish, the other of French extraction. The younger of the two, the Fleming, bore the name of Cornelius Jansen. His parents were peasants

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\* Martin, *Histoire de France*,

of a grade of society so humble as not to be distinguished by a surname. His father was Jan Ottosen—John the son of Otto, and he in his turn was known as Cornelius the son of John. The elder of the two by four years bore the more high-sounding name of Duverger de Hauranne, and is known in history as Saint Cyran, from the obscure abbey of which he soon afterwards became abbot.

The two friends, who had both been students at Louvain, but appear to have first met in Paris, retired to a property belonging to the family of De Hauranne, near Bayonne, and there for six years devoted themselves to the close study of the Fathers, and especially of Augustine. The result of these studies was what is known as Jansenism. The students came to the conclusion that the real teaching of Augustine had been buried for centuries, and that its recovery would involve a great change in the Church's belief as well as in her practice. Yet they held that the safety and health of the Church depended upon this recovery, and to this end they both, in their several spheres, consecrated their lives.

Jansen, after holding for some years a professorship in the University of Louvain, became bishop of the

Flemish see of Ypres. The book, the fruit of a life's study, which contained his interpretation of Augustine, and which became the recognised exposition of Jansenism, was only given to the world after his death. Saint Cyran accepted the obscure abbey of this name on the borders of Touraine, but resided for the greater part of his life in Paris. High ecclesiastical office was repeatedly pressed upon him. No less than five times the episcopal dignity was offered to him. He desired, however, no other power than that which belongs to the director of consciences, and to a commanding position here he speedily attained. The name of Saint Cyran is one of the great names of French Catholicism. He seems to have combined in an eminent degree the love of souls with learning, unworldliness, and practical wisdom. Stern as his theology was, exacting as were his demands upon his penitents, he was full of tenderness, and won from his pupils not only unbounded veneration but also the strongest personal love.

His influence in Paris became so marked as to arouse the suspicions of Richelieu, who is said to have pronounced Saint Cyran to be more dangerous than six armies. The precise grounds of the powerful Cardinal's hostility

towards the simple priest living in humble seclusion in the midst of the city are not plainly visible. Not long before his death, Saint Cyran said that the narrow way had compelled him "to choose between a prison and a bishopric : for it was at that time easy to see that under a government which was willing to rule only over slaves the refusal of one must necessarily lead to the other."

At the same time, special causes of animosity existed, or were believed to exist. Great man as Richelieu was, he appears to have been wanting in magnanimity, and to have been unable to despise little things. Amidst his many titles to honour, he hungered for the fame of a theologian, and he had once published a catechism, some of whose teachings were challenged at the time. The adverse criticisms were ascribed by the Cardinal, although it would appear wrongly, to Saint Cyran, who thus gave the powerful minister unpardonable offence. Whatever the reasons of Richelieu's dislike may have been, it was strong enough to lead to the imprisonment of Saint Cyran. He was committed in 1638 to the solitary prison of Vincennes, where he was kept in confinement for nearly five years. He was liberated only after the Cardinal's death, on the 6th of February, 1643. His

health had, however, been broken down by his long captivity, and he died in October of the same year.

Such was the background to the life of the extraordinary man who made the controversy regarding Grace a matter of the most lively interest to his contemporaries, and whose writings possess such importance that they constrain posterity to revive incidents and conflicts which they might otherwise be content to forget.

There are in all spheres of knowledge men whose names stand out as landmarks, indicating the beginning of a new stage of progress. Their thoughts possess such value that they speedily become absorbed in the general stream of opinion, and few remember their original source. Such in the region of religious thought is Blaise Pascal. He holds in his own sphere a position similar to that which Newton occupies in science or Spinoza in philosophy. If knowledge has received such immense additions since these men lived that they have become as rocks covered by the waves, it is equally true that without their help we should not have left them behind. If we see farther than they did, it is because we stand upon their shoulders.

The controversy about Grace represents, as we have seen, the precise point which religious thought had reached in the first half of the seventeenth century. It presented the issue which at that moment seemed of all to be the nearest and the most urgent. This question pressed itself with peculiar force upon the mind of Pascal. He saw it in both its aspects, both as a question of conduct and also as a question of belief.

How did the current practice of the Christian world accord with the requirements of the Gospel? Searching for an answer, he saw an attempt made by the most powerful of the religious orders to accommodate the claims of Christ to the practice of the world. An elaborate system met his eyes by which it was sought to soften or undo the Christian law whenever it comes in conflict with men's inclinations. The exposure of this system was the purpose of one of the two writings by which he is chiefly remembered: "Letters written to a dweller in the provinces by one of his friends on the subject of the present disputes in the Sorbonne." In the other book, *The Thoughts*, Pascal takes part in the controversy of his time by endeavouring to show that ✓ the actual facts of human nature, its greatness and its

littleness, its sublimity and its meanness, are only explicable on the assumption that the history of humanity contains some great primæval catastrophe which has been only partially repaired. Thus the two books, however widely they may differ in style, do really present two different aspects of the same subject. They both presuppose the distinctive view of Jansenism, viz., ✓ that the way of salvation is narrow and difficult, and that they are few who find it. None the less do both books repay the most careful study. They bring us into contact with a mind of the highest power, possessed, to the exclusion of all else, by the love of God and the longing for perfection.

A short biography of Pascal was written after his death by his sister, Madame Périer, who did her utmost to mitigate the sufferings of his closing years, and in whose house in Paris he died. These few pages, which are to be found prefixed to all good editions of *The Thoughts*, tell us all, or nearly all, of their subject which it is essential to know.

From the very beginning it is evident that we are about to follow the course of an exceptional life. Astonishing evidences of unusual endowment present themselves at



the outset and continue to the end. Pascal, like John Stuart Mill, lost his mother at an early age, and never had any other teacher than his father. Unlike the English philosopher, however, his education seems to have inspired him, not only with veneration, but also with love for his teacher. His father's maxim, we are told, was to keep his pupil always above his work, and he appears from the very outset to have appealed to the child's reasoning faculties rather than to his memory, encouraging him to ask the reasons why things should be as they are. Thus we hear of the boy, not yet twelve years of age, struck by the resonance of a plate when touched by a knife, and the cessation of the sound when the hand is laid upon the plate, inquiring into the nature of sound, and even writing an essay on the subject. It is not necessary to repeat the anecdote of his discovery at the same age, without any assistance from book or teacher, of the first thirty-two of Euclid's propositions, an almost incredible, but apparently indubitable instance of precocity. At nineteen he invented an arithmetical machine. At the age of twenty-three he appears to have added to the scientific knowledge of his time by experiments upon the weight of the atmosphere. It is plain

that he possessed mathematical ability of the highest order.

Equally plain are evidences of an unusual command of language. "My brother," Madame Périer tells us, "had a natural eloquence, which gave him a wonderful facility in saying what he wished: but he had also framed for his own guidance certain rules whose propriety had not at that time been perceived, and these he observed with such advantage that not only did he say what he wished, but he said it in the way he wished, and his words had the effect he intended." Pascal is believed by French writers to have given to the language the definite form by which it is still characterized. Previous to him the language was still in a fluid state. It had ceased to be Latin while it had not yet become French. His use of it gave it that fixity which it has ever since retained. The French would still regard him, I believe, as the greatest of their prose writers. We must not, however, expect to find his language distinguished by any qualities except lucidity, sincerity and precision. It is quite free from ornament. Its charm resides in its ease. Thus it is an excellent model for us all in our use of words, provided always that we observe

M. Havet's caution. Pascal, he says, is the most excellent of models provided that we take care in studying him to remain ourselves, and not to copy him. "To give our minds to discern truth and to love it : to say nothing except what we clearly perceive and feel ; to value an expression only in proportion to its luminousness and sincerity ; to labour to make our ideas clear, and to strive after this until we are assured that others also grasp them and that they are affected by our feelings ; to persevere in this painful toil through zeal, through the love of the good we can do, and the cause we can serve ; this is what we can all learn from Pascal, not doubtless to do it as he did, but to do it each according to his measure and his ability."

This command of language is, as we have seen, the result partly of exceptional endowment, and partly of assiduous application. He gained it, as we are told in the preface to the first edition of *The Thoughts*, by a toil so obstinate that he would often recast as many as ten times a paragraph which any one else would have thought admirable at the beginning. "If Pascal wrote but little, and never anything of wide compass," says the critic already quoted, "it was not merely that his

health failed, but that he subjected his thought to a criticism so severe that it made him too hard to please, and the execution of an extensive work became a labour beyond human strength."

Such is the toil lying beneath these writings which seem so facile. Many of the *Provincial Letters* were begun many times before the form finally adopted was reached. It was of one of these letters that its author used the phrase which has been ascribed to so many others, and said that the letter was as long as it is because he had not had time to make it shorter.

This surprising intellectual vigour was, however, balanced by one great disability. Pascal died at the age of thirty-nine, and like Calvin and Richard Baxter lived with death never far out of sight. He used to say, his sister tells us, that from the age of eighteen he had never passed a day without pain. His sufferings seem to have quite baffled the medical skill of his time, and to have increased in severity with his age. The last four years of his life, in which most of the *Thoughts* were written, are described as one continuous weariness. The beginnings of these ailments are attributed by his sister to over-application in his early years. This

account does not seem, as has been observed, a quite adequate explanation of sufferings so great and prolonged. Perhaps these sufferings could now have been averted or greatly mitigated. That they were much aggravated by Pascal's self-chosen austerities cannot be doubted. In any case we observe that he had in his own person an instance ever with him of the truth which evidently held a central place in his mind—that of the simultaneous greatness and littleness of the human lot. He reached with ease the highest intellectual eminences while his body was indeed one of humiliation, and strove ever to quench the spirit.

We cannot expect the religion of a man so placed to show the joyousness by which the lives of many whom we might compare with him have been characterized. Legend represents him as seeing, from the moment of the accident to which his conversion is usually, but perhaps wrongly ascribed, an abyss ever at his side. This is true in the spirit if not in the letter. The abysses which yawn around us were visible to him, and he looked with steady gaze into their depths. Many of his thoughts are like the Psalmist's cry from the deep.

The conversion of Pascal is, as has been said, generally ascribed to an accident which befel him as he was driving a carriage drawn—some say by four and some by six horses—across one of the bridges that form the exits of what is now the Bois de Boulogne. The bridge had no side wall, and the two foremost horses plunged into the river. The destruction of the entire equipage seemed inevitable, when the reins by which the two leaders were connected with the rest of the team gave way and left the carriage and its occupant in safety on the bridge. The catastrophe that seemed so certain made a deep impression upon Pascal, and it is apparently to it that the strange confession of faith refers which he composed at this time and ever afterwards wore within the lining of his vest. Here the paper was discovered after his death. It has been thus translated :—



THE YEAR OF GRACE 1654,  
 MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23rd, DAY OF ST. CLEMENT, POPE  
 AND MARTYR, AND OTHERS IN THE MARTYROLOGY,  
 EVE OF SAINT CHRYSOGONUS, MARTYR, AND OTHERS;  
 FROM ABOUT HALF-PAST TEN AT NIGHT, TO  
 ABOUT HALF AFTER MIDNIGHT,  
 FIRE.

GOD OF ABRAHAM, GOD OF ISAAC, GOD OF JACOB,  
 NOT OF THE PHILOSOPHERS AND THE WISE.  
 SECURITY, SECURITY. FEELING, JOY, PEACE.  
 GOD OF JESUS CHRIST

*Deum meum et Deum vestrum.*

THY GOD SHALL BE MY GOD.

FORGETFULNESS OF THE WORLD AND OF ALL SAVE GOD.

HE CAN BE FOUND ONLY IN THE WAYS TAUGHT  
 IN THE GOSPEL.

GREATNESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL.

O RIGHTEOUS FATHER, THE WORLD HATH NOT KNOWN THEE,  
 BUT I HAVE KNOWN THEE.

JOY, JOY, JOY, TEARS OF JOY.

I HAVE SEPARATED MYSELF FROM HIM.

*Dereliquerunt me fontem aquæ Vivæ.*

MY GOD WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME ? . . . .

THAT I BE NOT SEPARATED FROM THEE ETERNALLY,  
 THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL : THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW THEE THE  
 ONLY TRUE GOD, AND HIM WHOM THOU HAST SENT, JESUS CHRIST,

JESUS CHRIST,

JESUS CHRIST.

I HAVE SEPARATED MYSELF FROM HIM ; I HAVE FLED, RENOUNCED,  
 CRUCIFIED HIM,

MAY I NEVER BE SEPARATED FROM HIM.

HE MAINTAINS HIMSELF IN ME ONLY IN THE WAYS TAUGHT  
 IN THE GOSPEL.

RENUNCIATION TOTAL AND SWEET.

ETC.

This was no doubt the definite moment in the life of Pascal of which Dean Church was thinking when he said : “ The religion of Pascal is the religion of a converted man—of a man, I mean, who at a definite time of his life had felt himself touched and overcome by the greatness and the reasonableness of things unseen, and had consciously turned to God, not from vice, but from bondage to the interests of time, from the fascination of a merely intellectual life, from the frivolity which forgets the other world in this.”

It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that Pascal had ever committed himself deliberately even to worldliness, much less to unbelief. He says that his father had early inspired him with that respect for religion by which he was himself characterized. When Pascal was twenty-three his attention was drawn for the first time to the writings of Saint Cyran and to a small work of Jansen entitled *The Reformation of the Inner Man*. These books impressed him deeply, so that, in the words of his sister, he renounced from this time forward all other knowledge, to apply himself exclusively to the one thing which Jesus Christ calls needful.



To this resolution he did not, indeed, at all literally adhere, but the fact that he made it shows the promptings of his nature. A year afterwards we find his health so broken that his physicians enjoin entire rest from study, and send him to Paris that he may find relief in the distractions of the capital. Here he lived for a period of seven years in what afterwards seemed to him glaring worldliness. There is, however, no evidence to show that the worldliness was worse than the fulfilment of the demands which society makes upon a man of rank and fashion. His sister assures us that vice never had any attractions for him. Perhaps an improvement in his health at this time made a lengthened life seem more probable. In any case we now hear of him contemplating marriage, and proposing to buy some office which would yield him a permanent income.

The gleam of sunshine was, however, of short duration. In 1654 occurred the carriage accident described above, which was the occasion of his second and final conversion.

He sought the solitude of Port Royal, the monastery twenty miles from Paris which Saint Cyran had directed, and where his spirit still lived in a company of men and

women of whom some had taken life-long vows, while some were merely temporary guests. Pascal's younger sister had entered the convent of Port Royal eight years before with her brother's full consent, and we can readily understand the delight with which she welcomed back to the severe joys of the religious life the brother whom she had thought of as lost to the world.

The last years of Pascal's life, which were spent mostly in Paris, are years of continuous suffering, and present to our minds one very persistent perversion of the Gospel message. It was his conviction that the whole-hearted service of God required him to desist from those pursuits which we should call secular. This conviction was probably unquestioned, in theory at least, in his age. The Church and the world were universally looked upon as separate and antagonistic organizations. Friendship with the world was regarded as enmity with God, without any heed to the change of meaning which had passed over the term "world" since the Apostle's days.

Thus Pascal, when he first became sensible of the claims of religion, felt constrained to abandon his scientific studies. So the years subsequently in which he shared the ordinary social life of his time seemed to

him now, after his final conversion, years not only of worldliness but of sin. So too now, when his health irreparably failed and the end was obviously drawing near, he deliberately refused the solaces he might have enjoyed because these seemed to belong to the world he had abandoned. He made his sick-bed as hard as a rigorous asceticism could make it. He besought his sister, shortly before his death, to allow him to be conveyed to the Incurable Hospital, so that he might be able to die among the poor.

These austerities, as they are related by Mme. Périer, may seem to some of us, as they seemed to Voltaire and Condorcet, the sad symptoms of insanity. We may think that the recesses of a diseased mind are opened out before us. Our misgivings may even resist the extraordinary evidence of spiritual vigour furnished by the fact that the dying man was able to find distraction from his sufferings in the unravelling of hitherto unsolved mathematical mysteries.

Deeper reflection rebukes these hasty conclusions. If we make the opinions and doings of ordinary men the measures of sanity, we shall be led to some strange results. In truth it is the very divergence of conspicuous

lives from the ordinary standard which makes their study especially profitable. We are constrained to think and to learn when we see these striking departures from ordinary living, this outrageous violation of the laws of prudence.

It may be, as has been urged,\* that Pascal, "had he allowed himself to feel the love of God in his life in the love of wife and children, had he pressed on with swift step into the mysteries of the physical universe, and been content to live a faithful and God-fearing life amidst the license of court and city," would have learned secrets of Divine wisdom and human possibility of which, as it was, he remained ignorant. In that case, however, there would hardly be in his life that startling and arousing power we find in it now. It is precisely because he differs at so many points from ourselves that he attracts, and interests, and moves us.

Even the austerities of Pascal's closing years may teach us that life is only a desirable possession when we propose to ourselves some end beyond it. If we make it its own end it ceases to profit. He may have misconceived

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\* Beard, *Port Royal*.

this truth from a failure to see that the eternal is wrapped up in the temporal, yet he does show us that the love and service of God can alone satisfy the human soul. He shows us, too, that though flesh and heart may fail, God may yet remain the strength of the heart and its portion for ever.

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## **2. The Provincial Letters.**





## THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS.

EVERY human institution is in some degree changed and modified by the progress of time. New needs arise to which it must adapt itself. Unthought-of obstacles turn it out of its original course. Indeed, if an institution does not possess this self-adapting power, its very rigidity impairs its usefulness, and threatens its life.

That the Company of Jesus had come, in the 17th century, one hundred years after its foundation, to pursue a policy which its original founder had not foreseen, would not be denied by its own historians. The declared intentions of the founder, however, seem, to our minds at least, dangerously susceptible of the policy by which it was afterwards sought to give them effect.

Ignatius Loyola, when he became fully conscious of his task, proposed to establish a society which in aim and constitution should differ essentially from the existing religious orders. Its purpose was not to be the

acquisition or the diffusion of learning ; nor was it to be a contemplative order interceding perpetually for the world it had quitted ; nor again was it to devote itself to works of mercy, such as the care of the sick or the instruction of the poor. The founder, in establishing his society, wished simply to put an instrument of perfect efficiency into the hands of the Supreme Pontiff, to be used by him as he might determine.

To the three general vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the members of the order added a fourth, by which they pledged themselves to execute, without objection and without delay, the behests, whatever these might be, of the Supreme Pontiff.

The perfect efficiency of the instrument was to be secured by one simple but far-reaching expedient. Ignatius said that although the other orders might surpass his society in this or that respect, he desired that it should surpass them in the virtue of obedience. He explained that there were in the religious life two kinds of obedience, one which was imperfect and the other which was perfect. The imperfect form had eyes by which it saw amiss, the other was wisely blind ; the one retained its own judgment upon the behests given ;

the other had no judgment, it submitted its judgment to the judgment, its will to the will, of the superior.

A few years before his death he dictated some maxims which may be regarded as his last testament. All are concerned with obedience :

“ Entering upon the religious life, I must be entirely resigned (i.e., stripped of my own will and dependent upon the will of others) in the presence of God our Lord and him who has been placed over me in the place of God.”

“ I must allow myself to be handled like liquid wax, which obeys the hand that shapes it.”

“ I should make myself like a corpse, which has neither will nor feeling ; like an automaton, which turns where we wish to make it ; like a stick in an old man’s hand, who makes what use of it he pleases.”

Nor was this obedience to be limited even by the misgivings of conscience :—

“ If it should appear to me that my superior orders me to do something which is against my conscience, I shall trust him rather than my own judgment, unless, indeed, the evidence should forbid me. But if I cannot reconcile my mind to the command of my superior, let me at least

abandon my own judgment and feeling, and let me submit the whole matter to the judgment of one, two, or three of my superiors, so as to follow what they shall determine : if I refuse to do this, I am far from the perfection and from the duties of the true religious."

Thus the obedience of the Jesuit was to be limitless. Even the protests of conscience were not allowed to restrain it. The system could hardly fail to confuse the moral sense, to make the boundaries between right and wrong shifting and uncertain. Nor can we wonder that those accustomed thus to put their own conscience in fetters should not hesitate to allow still greater liberties to others : that they should tamper with the moral law in the interest of others, as they had tampered with it in their own.

These evils inherent in the system did not show themselves at first. The first years of the Company of Jesus have surrounded it in the minds of members of the Roman Church with a halo which its subsequent history has hardly been able to efface. It was these early glories which led Pascal to say that the original spirit of order no longer, in his day, animated its existing representatives.

At the beginning of the 17th century devout Roman Catholics might well feel that the Church's very existence was threatened. Germany and England had repudiated the Roman obedience, and in France what was then known as libertinism was widely prevalent. By this name, which is of frequent occurrence in Pascal's writings, we must understand, not one form of moral obliquity, but a general laxity of belief and practice. A libertine was one who took liberties with the Church's creed and with her precepts when these came in conflict with his own interests or prepossessions. Libertinism was thus essentially the equivalent of what we know as worldliness.

This spirit was then, as perhaps it has ever been, the most dangerous foe to faith, and war with it was the task to which the Jesuit Order felt itself to be most imperatively called. The Society, during the century which followed its foundation, had found its vocation and its work. It had recognized its mission to be the direction of consciences, and especially the consciences of the great, and, as closely allied to this, the education of the young.

This spiritual direction had, however, come to be animated by a policy which, although it may have been adopted in good faith, has none the less incurred the

emphatic condemnation of history. The problem, let us remember, was to retain for the Church the allegiance of a libertine or worldly society. This allegiance had become in France merely nominal, and outside there was the ferment of opinion which the Lutheran revolt had occasioned.

We can well understand that the heads of the Society, contemplating this dangerous situation, should have thought that the French world would be lost to the Church if she attempted to subject it to a law which was too strict. It seemed to them disastrous to make upon men demands with which it was certain they would not comply. Thus there had arisen a large number of treatises in which the attempt was made so to soften the Church's law that she might still retain men of the world within her obedience. These treatises were intended primarily for the use of confessors, but many of them came to be very widely diffused. They were of course all written in Latin, but the knowledge of Latin was then, it need hardly be said, much more general than it is now. It is impossible to suppose that an acquaintance with these books was confined to the learned or the clergy. One of them is mentioned as being, in the year 1656, in its forty-first edition.

A further relaxation of the Christian law resulted from the general acceptance by the Society of the principle known as probabilism. By this was meant that it was lawful, on any disputed point of conduct, to accept the opinion of any recognized teacher. Thus if one guide would not grant the required indulgence, appeal might be made to another. And inasmuch as there was hardly a question on which some authoritative teacher could not be found who had taken the laxer view, evasion was rendered always possible. "How wrong they are," exclaims one of these writers, "who complain that the doctors in matters of conduct give so many and so varied decisions. They should rather rejoice at this, seeing in it new grounds for consolation and hope. For it is this variety of opinion in matters of conduct which renders the yoke of the Lord easier and milder."

It was this lowering of the Christian standard which aroused the indignation of Pascal. One who owed his conversion to Saint Cyran or his pupils, and had committed himself so definitely to the doctrine of the narrow way, could not fail to be scandalized by the Jesuit casuistry.

His feelings found expression in a series of letters which are the best illustrations in modern literature of what has

been called dialectic irony, "where the writer effects his purpose by placing the opinion of his adversary in the foreground, saluting it with every demonstration of respect, while he is busy in withdrawing, one by one, all the supports on which it rests, and he never ceases to approach it with an air of deference until he has completely undermined it, when he leaves it to sink by the weight of its own absurdity."\*

These Letters are supposed to be addressed to a provincial by a friend in Paris, who writes with the object of giving his correspondent an account of the recent disputes in the Sorbonne. It is only, however, the first four and the last three of the eighteen letters which actually deal with these disputes. The remaining eleven are an exposure of the Jesuit casuistry.

To unfold the whole intricate chain of circumstances which led to the *Provincial Letters* would be a most difficult and wearisome task. The essential facts, however, can be easily stated. The work to which the Flemish bishop Jansen had devoted his life, and in which he endeavoured to recall to a forgetful world the teaching of Augustine, the *Augustinus*, was only published after

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\* Thirwall's *Essay on the Irony of Sophocles*.



his death. The book, lengthy and dull as it is to our minds, became at once an object of the most lively interest, and provoked vehement hostility. Foremost among its opponents were, as was natural, the avowed disciples of the broad way—the Jesuit Order. On their representations the book was examined at Rome and formally condemned in a Papal bull. The bull, however, confined itself to a general condemnation of certain propositions contained in the book, without any definite enumeration of these propositions.

This result was too vague to satisfy the French opponents of the Jansenist doctrines—as they now began to be called. They were anxious to have the objectionable propositions distinctly set forth and formally repudiated throughout the length and breadth of France. By this means it would be possible to draw up a distinct formula of renunciation which every suspected person might be called upon to sign.

With this end in view the five famous propositions were extracted in France from the book. We are most forcibly reminded by these propositions of the fact that the language of religion waxes old as doth a garment, and changes from age to age. To us they have almost ceased

to be intelligible. They sound in our ears as one speaking in an unknown tongue. They are as follows :—

I. Some commandments of God are impossible of performance to just men, according to their present strength, even though they be willing and striving to perform them : and the grace which would make these commandments possible is also wanting to them.

II. In the state of fallen nature, no resistance is ever made to internal grace.

III. In order to produce merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature, liberty from necessity is not required in man, but liberty from constraint is sufficient.

IV. The Semi-Pelagians admitted the need of prevenient internal grace for all actions, even for the beginning of faith ; and they were heretics, inasmuch as they would have this grace to be such as the will of man could either resist or obey.

V. It is a Semi-Pelagian error to say that Christ died or shed his blood for all men, universally.

Although the propositions, however, may at first sight appear to involve us in a maze of profitless speculation,

they do really represent a very simple and familiar view of the Christian life. They imply that mere membership of the visible Church is not a guarantee of salvation, that there are Divine requirements with which the majority of those calling themselves Christians do not comply. They trace this failure on the part of men back to a hidden source, and ascribe it to God's inscrutable counsels. The important fact, however, is not this inference, but the experiences which warrant the inference. Is it, or is it not, true that membership in the Church places and keeps a man in the way of salvation?

To this question the Jesuit theologians returned an affirmative, while Jansen and his followers returned a negative answer.

After prolonged controversies and intrigues, the reigning Pontiff was induced to condemn these five propositions. The bull of condemnation did not positively affirm that the propositions were to be found in Jansen's book, but the language leaves us in no doubt that such affirmation was intended.

The bull was received and accepted by the French Church. Opposing voices one by one ceased to make

themselves heard, and it seemed as if the Jesuits had obtained their desire.

Underneath the surface, however, the fires continued to smoulder. The most conspicuous member of the Arnauld family, the great doctor, as he was called, had occasion to write two letters to one of his friends, a nobleman who had consulted him on an ecclesiastical difficulty. The letters, like most of the documents of that age, were very lengthy. The second is described as extending to 250 quarto pages.

XX Their publication fanned into fresh flame the smouldering fires of controversy. They were denounced to the Sorbonne as containing two distinct heretical propositions. The writer was charged with temerity, as it was called, because he had hinted that the five famous propositions were not really to be found in Jansen's book. This came to be known as the question of fact. The other question was one of faith. Arnauld had asserted that Divine grace had failed the Apostle Peter when he fell.

These two statements were submitted to the Sorbonne as deserving of censure, and the expulsion of Arnauld from the faculty of which he was a member was demanded. These were the recent disputes which the writer of the

*Provincial Letters* makes it his object to explain to his friend.

While the issue was still pending, Pascal happened to be discussing the proceedings with Arnauld himself and two or three friends. One of the company spoke of the propriety of informing the public regarding the matters in dispute. The letters themselves were read only by the learned, and ordinary men might readily believe that the very foundations of the faith were being threatened. Arnauld admitted the truth of these representations, and thereupon at once set to work to prepare a popular pamphlet. When he had finished he read it in the hearing of the same company of friends.

His pen, however, never a light one, had been made doubly heavy by the anxieties through which he was passing, and the pamphlet was received without any expression of approval. Perceiving his want of success, he turned to Pascal, then 33 years of age, and said, "You are young—you should do it."

Pascal, who had never at that time written anything except on scientific subjects, replied that he had an idea how the desired pamphlet should be written, but that he could only undertake to make a rough draft and submit

it to the judgment of his friends. This rough draft was the first Provincial Letter, as we now read it. It begins as follows :—

PARIS, *the 23rd Jan., 1656.*

*Sir,—*

*We have been seriously misinformed. It was only yesterday I learned the truth. Till then I was under the impression that the subject in dispute in the Sorbonne was one of great importance and of extreme consequence to religion. So many meetings of a body so celebrated as the Faculty of Paris, at which so many extraordinary and unparalleled incidents took place, awaken such lofty ideas in our minds that we can only suppose the subject in debate to have been equally extraordinary.*

*You will be much surprised when you learn from this narrative what is the outcome of this vehement agitation. This I have inquired into fully, and now propose to tell you in a few words.*

*Two questions are under discussion, one of fact and the other of faith.*

*The question of fact is to determine whether Dr. Arnauld is guilty of temerity in saying in his second letter : that he had read the book of Jansen, that he did not find in it the*

*propositions condemned by the late Pope, but that, inasmuch as he condemned these propositions wherever they were to be met with, he condemned them in Jansen if they were to be found there.*

*The question is whether he could thus without temerity suggest a doubt that these propositions might not be Jansen's when their lordships the bishops had declared that they were.*

*The matter is brought before the Sorbonne. Seventy-one doctors undertake his defence, and maintain that he could make no other reply to those who asked him if he believed the propositions to be in this book except that he had not seen them there, and that nevertheless he condemned them if they were there.*

*Some even went further and affirmed that in spite of every search for these propositions in the book, they could never find them, and that they even found others altogether opposed to them. Thus they urgently demanded that if there were any doctor who had seen them, he would be good enough to point them out, as this was a most simple way of reducing all, and Dr. Arnauld himself, to silence. Such was the action of the defenders.*

*On the other side were eighty secular doctors and some mendicant monks who condemned Dr. Arnauld's*

*proposition without being willing to inquire whether what he said was true or false, and who even declared that it was not a question of the truth, but only of the temerity of his proposition.*

The successful translation of the letters is admittedly difficult—perhaps impossible. But even this rendering of the opening paragraphs of the first letter will show us the unusual character of this work of genius, and can hardly fail to awaken reflections and perhaps misgivings in our minds.

In the first place we may well be surprised to find a work such as this emanating from one who had so recently been brought to the edge of the abyss, who had in a very rigid sense abandoned the world, who wore on his person a paper descriptive of the awfulness of his conversion and the deep peace which had followed it, and who died a few years after this date the death of a Christian saint.

We are surprised to find a man such as this employing raillery in the service of religion. The Provincial Letters are the first instance of the attempted consecration of this worldly weapon. Sacred things are here dealt with in the light, graceful, well-bred fashion which conveys the



impression, whether intended or not, that the speaker is not deeply in earnest and does not regard his subject as one of paramount importance. This may well seem a doubtful and dangerous innovation. The door which Pascal thus opened was entered by many imitators in the succeeding century whose approach he never contemplated. If the greatest issues could be dealt with thus cavalierly by the saint and the ascetic, there was no longer any barrier to put them beyond the reach of the satirist and the scoffer.

Pascal is said to have been asked towards the close of his life whether he regretted having written the Letters, and to have replied that if he had it to do again he would make them still stronger. It can hardly be doubted, however, that Saint Cyran, had he been living, would have thought otherwise. The first two letters are believed to have been actually written in the monastery of Port Royal in the fields. But already the best and purest days of Port Royal were past, the days of perfect simplicity and sincerity, when there was no thought of fighting the world with its own weapons.

In truth, however, these first three and last two letters awaken a more serious misgiving than is raised even by

the raillery in which they abound. They are intended to suggest that no serious and vital difference divided the two parties in these disputes, that the controversy was one regarding words rather than things. They could thus hardly fail to obscure still further the fundamental question from which the whole strife had arisen.

That question was by no means a verbal one. Jansen's book represented one conception of Christianity, while its opponents represented another conception. Whether the five propositions condemned by the Pope were to be found in the book or not, there is no doubt that they really expressed Jansen's opinion. The question was not whether they could be found verbally in his pages, but whether they were true.

Two consistent interpretations of the Christian message were here in conflict. The French Church was being called upon to decide between the disciples of the broad and those of the narrow way. It would have been a nobler, although a more dangerous, policy to keep the attention of the disputants riveted upon this great issue, instead of diverting them from it by what was little better than a verbal quibble. This Pascal himself seems to have recognized a few years later.

“The method of defence,” he wrote in 1661, “adopted against the decisions of the Pope and the Bishops, was so subtle, so timid, and so wanting in precision, that it does not appear worthy of real defenders of the Church.”\* And he goes on to blame the policy of distinguishing between the question of fact and that of faith, and to express the opinion that it would have been better to accept the five propositions as accurate, but to maintain that the views expressed in them were not those of the Flemish bishop alone, but those also of S. Augustine and S. Paul.

To the same effect, the simple biographer of S. Cyran, who had, as St. Beuve puts it, “known Joseph,” wrote in memorable words :

“Perhaps, too, this method chosen of defending the truth was not pure enough, or the means employed were too precipitate, or were not sufficiently considered, or were even too human. We often harm God’s cause more by too much action than if we remained in a humble repose, endeavouring to maintain our confidence in Him by frequent prayer.”

“It may also be added that the lines marked by

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\* Quoted by Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*, 5th Ed., iii., p. 62.

M. de St. Cyran were not observed, and that effort was not restricted to showing that the doctrine followed was not that of Jansen but that of S. Augustine.”\*

Thus, whatever the literary merits of these five letters, we may believe that they would have long since been forgotten had not Pascal, from the fourth letter onwards, addressed himself to a subject of abiding interest. This subject arose naturally out of the questions with which he had hitherto been dealing. It might have been suggested by the Scripture saying, “*Every tree is known by its fruits.*”

From the very beginning, the Christian morality has been the most persuasive advocate of the Christian creed. And again and again, laxity of life has been in the Church as the breath of corruption, summoning the destroying eagles. Thus Pascal’s attention was most naturally drawn to the morality actually taught by his opponents.

“*There is nothing*—so he begins his fourth Letter—*like the Jesuits. I have seen Jacobins, Doctors, and all sorts of people, but a visit such as I have just paid was still wanting*

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\* Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*, 5th Ed., iii., p. 86.

*to my education. The others only copy them. Things are always better observed at their source."*

The letters from this point to the seventeenth are occupied with an exposure of the maxims and policy of the Jesuit casuists. The concessions which the Society's theologians were prepared to make to human passions or human weakness on such matters as duelling, usury, simony, theft, are unfolded in a series of illustrations which are so laughable that indignation gives way to amusement. Our first impulse is to doubt whether any Christian teachers could ever have deliberately committed themselves to these scandalous evasions. On this point, however, doubt does not seem permissible. The various passages quoted by Pascal may be found in any good edition of the *Provincial Letters*, and show plainly that the maxims were no inventions of his own. "If the author of the *Provincial Letters* has not always felt obliged to translate or reproduce literally the texts he quoted, still it has not been possible to convict him of carelessness or serious forgetfulness on more than two or three occasions at the most, and never of deliberate deception." Such are the words of an impartial critic (F. Brunetière).

The following are a few examples of these evasions, taken almost at random from the Letters VI. and VII. : The accepted interpretation of the precept enjoining almsgiving in Luke xi. 41, in the Roman Church of that day seems to have been, "Give alms of your superfluous goods." Thus the question naturally arose, What constitutes superfluity? This question the casuist Vasquez answers as follows : "What people of the world keep to improve their position and that of their kinsmen cannot be called superfluity. This is why we shall hardly ever find that people of the world or even kings have any superfluity."

The sin of simony was defined by the Church as the giving of a temporal good for a spiritual one. Upon this definition Escobar, a Spanish Jesuit, comments as follows : "If money be given as the price of a benefice, it is manifest simony. But if it be given as the motive to induce the holder of the benefice to resign it, it is not simony, even although the holder may regard the money as his principal object."

The following is the interpretation put by Reginaldus upon S. Paul's precept, "*Render to no man evil for evil*," and upon the passages in the Gospels which urge

the forgiveness of injuries : “ It seems that a man of war may at once attack one who has wounded him, not indeed with the intention of returning evil for evil, but with that of preserving his honour.”

A still more incredible decision is the following : “ The holder of a benefice can without mortal sin desire the death of one to whom he is obliged to pay part of his income, and a son may desire the death of his father and rejoice when it occurs, provided it be only for the property which accrues to him, and not from any personal hatred.”

It was Voltaire who said in an oft-quoted passage, that there was as much salt in the first provincials as in Molière, and that Bossuet contained nothing more sublime than the last. Often in these later letters Pascal abandons his ordinary tone of raillery and appears as the earnest and indignant champion of outraged righteousness. The following is the conclusion of the tenth letter, which deals with the terms on which sin should be absolved. Pascal at last breaks out as follows :—

*O my father, there is no patience which you would not tire ! It is impossible to hear without horror the things I*

*have just heard ! They are not mine, you say. I know it well, my father. But you have no abhorrence of them, and far from detesting the authors of these maxims, you esteem them. Do you not fear that your consent may make you a partaker of their crime ? And can you be ignorant that it is not merely the authors of offences whom St. Paul judges to be worthy of death, but also those who consent to them.*

*Was it not enough to have made so many forbidden things permissible by the palliatives you have brought to them ? Was it necessary also to give men the opportunity of committing the very crimes you have not been able to excuse by the facility and the certainty of absolution you offer them, when you destroy with this object the power of priests, and oblige them to absolve, rather as slaves than judges, sinners the most inveterate—to absolve them without any love of God, without any amendment of life, when they have given no sign of regret save promises such as they have already broken a hundred times ; without penance, if they do not wish to submit to it, and without forsaking the occasions of sin, if it is inconvenient to them to do so ? . . . But you go further. . . . You violate the great commandment which comprehends the law and the prophets. You attack piety*



*within the heart ; you remove the spirit that giveth life ; you say that the love of God is not necessary for salvation ; you even go so far as to pretend that the removal of the obligation to love God is the benefit which Jesus Christ has brought to the world. This is the height of impiety. . . . You dare to withdraw the anathema which S. Paul pronounces upon those who do not love the Lord Jesus. You destroy what S. John says, that he who loveth not abideth in death, and what Jesus Christ Himself says, that he who loveth not doth not keep His sayings. . . . Here indeed is the mystery of iniquity accomplished. . . . Open your eyes at last, my father, and if you have not been moved by the other false teachings of your casuists, let these last take you away from them by their excesses. I wish it with all my heart for you and for all your fathers, and I pray God that He may deign to make them understand how false the light is which has led them to such precipices, and that He may fill with the love of Himself those who release men from the obligation of loving Him.*

These are the unmistakable accents of real religion. In such passages Pascal stands in the true succession of the Apostles and Prophets, recalling once more to a

forgetful world the claims of the commonplace virtues. And it is this, as M. Brunetière has said, which gives alike to *The Thoughts* and to these *Provincial Letters* their permanent value. Both alike teach us that no religious observances can release us from the necessity of striving continually to make ourselves better and more disinterested, because there is no absolution and no communion which can take the place of the effort we must for ever make against ourselves. Pascal teaches this old and yet ever-needed lesson with a sincerity and an eloquence that have never been surpassed. "Never," says the critic I have just named, "will there be in the French language a more eloquent invective than the *Provincial Letters* : never a finer book than the mutilated fragments of *The Thoughts* : never a greater writer, or one whom we ought to re-read with more assiduity, to love more passionately and respect more profoundly than Pascal." \*

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\* Brunetière, *Études Critiques*.

### **3. The Thoughts.**



## THE THOUGHTS OF PASCAL.

SOME eight years before his death in 1662, Pascal, deeply affected by the sudden recovery of his niece from a painful bodily affliction, conceived the intention of writing a defence of the Christian religion. It was his habit, however, to keep his compositions a long time in his mind before he began to commit them to writing, so that his ideas might have time, so to speak, to settle, and thus be able to produce the effect he intended.

Thus, when his health finally broke down four years before his death, the proposed work still existed only in his own mind. His illness, whatever its nature may have been, was such as peremptorily to forbid mental application. While it did not confine him to his bed, nor even to his room, it precluded all literary composition.

The utmost the sick man was able to do was to jot down as they occurred to him the detached thoughts which he still hoped to combine one day into a harmonious

whole. This he did on any stray piece of paper which might at the moment be available. As these memoranda were intended only for his own use, he took no trouble to make them intelligible, or even legible, to any eye but his own.

These carelessly written memoranda are the *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal*, reflections upon the nature of God and the nature of man which are universally recognized to possess the highest originality, and have thus won a place in religious literature by the side of the *Confessions of Augustine*, the *Imitation*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. ✓

The slips of paper were pasted on a large note-book after Pascal's death by some unknown hand, apparently quite at random and without any regard to their subject matter.

The difficulty even of deciphering this autograph is forcibly brought home to us by M. Brunetière's description of its appearance : " It consists," he tells us, " of a large folio containing on its pages scraps of yellowish paper of all forms and sizes, pasted at random, we know not by what hand, but in any case by a hand singularly negligent or pitifully unskilful. Some of these have holes as if they had been previously filed ; some are

smear'd on the margin or in one of the corners, or on the opposite side, with marks of all kinds or with geometrical figures. All, or nearly all—for Pascal dictated some of the notes, we must suppose, not being able himself to hold the pen—are covered with a painful, irregular, hurried handwriting, of which the letters are hardly formed, and the lines are turned in all directions, sometimes stopping abruptly in the middle of a page, and sometimes with half their length hidden beneath additions and erasures.”\*

No wonder that a book originating in such a MS. should have had an eventful literary history. We are not surprised to learn that the first inspection of the fragments resulted in an opinion adverse to their publication. They appeared too unformed to be submitted to the public eye. Pascal's contemplated work had, however, become widely known, and his representatives were pressed to make public any attempts he might have made towards its execution.

Thus at length, seven years after his death, the revision and publication of the notes was entrusted to a small

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\* *Études Critiques.*

group consisting of seven or eight persons, of whom some had been intimate friends of Pascal, while all held the religious opinions identified with Port Royal. The relatives of Pascal were represented by his nephew, Etienne Périer, who was then twenty-six years old.

Three courses, as Etienne Périer tells us, were open to these executors of so valuable a legacy. They might publish the MS. exactly as it was. To do this, however, they decided, and no doubt rightly, would be merely to waste their labour, for few could or would read such a book. Rejecting this course, they might in the next place take upon themselves Pascal's unfulfilled design and incorporate the detached fragments into a finished treatise. This they attempted to do, but speedily found, as we might expect, that the treatise, when it came to be finished, would be their own and not Pascal's. The only other alternative was to print, without addition or alteration, as many of the fragments as possible, and leave out those which were obviously incomplete or unintelligible; and upon this course they decided.

The book appeared in 1670, with a preface written by Etienne Périer, in which he describes the course chosen as follows: "From the total number of thoughts only



those have been taken which seemed most clear and most finished, and they have been presented as they were found, without additions or changes, except that they have been brought into some kind of order, and those of them which bear upon the same subject have been grouped under the same titles, whereas in the original MS. they were without sequence or connection, and scattered here and there. All the rest which were either too obscure or too imperfect have been suppressed."

This seems the best plan the circumstances admitted of, if only it had been adhered to. Unfortunately it was not. Pascal's memoranda were repeatedly and seriously altered by their editors, and no intimation of these changes was given.

The alterations must be ascribed to two motives, one arising from the circumstances of the moment, and the other from our human nature.

In the year 1670, when the book appeared, the Jansenist controversy had subsided into a temporary peace. The five propositions extracted from Jansen's book had been condemned, and a formulary endorsing this condemnation had been signed, with whatever misgivings of conscience, by the nuns and recluses of Port Royal. Pascal's editors

were naturally very careful that nothing in the new book should endanger the peace of the Church; and this anxiety led to many softenings and excisions of the actual words of the MS.

A still more potent motive, however, was the desire that the book should really fulfil and not defeat its author's intention, which was to defend the Christian religion. Pascal, possessed as he was of a mind of the utmost strength and precision, fully realized the nature of his proposed task. He was quite alive to the strength of the arguments he had to meet, and he knew the points in his own position which especially invited attack. Thus many of these memoranda may be most reasonably regarded as objections or arguments which Pascal noted down in order that he might answer them. And like Newman, with whom he has been often compared, he would state the objection so as to do it full and perfect justice. He would make it as plausible as the opponent himself would have done. At the same time, the memoranda of course did not distinguish Pascal's own conclusions from those which he desired to overthrow. It may also well be that some of these notes are concessions which Pascal knew that he could safely make,

but which seemed in the highest degree dangerous to his editors.

In any case, the desire for edification prevailed over fidelity to the MS., and the editors altered freely wherever they thought it likely that Pascal's actual words would perplex or mislead the reader. In every such case they brought the words into the form which, as they expressed it, Pascal himself would have given them had he lived.

How many parallels to their action present themselves in the history of Christian literature, even in the vicissitudes through which the words of Christ Himself have passed! The alterations when they are discovered seem to later ages quite unwarrantable, and are pronounced by them to be forgeries. They are really the outcome of a situation where the right course is exceedingly difficult to discover, or rather where there is no absolutely and indisputably right course, but only a choice between evils.

Had these men given Pascal's *Thoughts* to the world in their authentic form, the *Thoughts* would have undoubtedly produced the effect they dreaded. We feel sure of this, because the *Thoughts*, as it was, and in spite

of the alterations, produced this effect. Pascal, like Newman, has often been represented as a sceptic at heart, and for the same reason, because of the intellectual detachment which enables him, for the time being, to cease to be himself, and to become the very person he is opposing. A man may however do this, as I am convinced both these writers did, without being really visited by doubt.

In any case, the *Thoughts of Pascal* remained for more than 170 years in the form given to them by the Port Royalist editors, and no one suspected the process to which they had been subjected. Edition followed edition. New thoughts and other remains of the illustrious writer were added from time to time, and still the printed text of the first edition was accepted without question by all subsequent editors.

At length, in 1844, it occurred to Victor Cousin, the well-known philosopher, to compare the printed editions with the autograph MS. in the National Library in Paris. He found, to use his own words, that "analysis cannot invent a way of altering the style of a great writer which that of Pascal has not suffered at the hands of Port Royal. He has come down to us mutilated and

disfigured in every way.” “We have given,” he proceeds to say, “numerous examples of every kind of alteration : alterations of words, alterations of terms, alterations of phrases ; suppressions, substitutions, additions ; arbitrary compositions, sometimes of a paragraph, sometimes of a whole chapter, by help of phrases and paragraphs foreign to one another ; and what is worse, decompositions, more arbitrary still and quite inconceivable, of chapters which in Pascal’s MS. were profoundly elaborated, and perfectly connected in all their parts.”\*

Of the recent editions of the *Thoughts* in which Cousin’s discoveries have been utilized, may be named that of Faugère, 1844, in which the words of the original MS. are accurately given, but the thoughts are arranged in a somewhat inconvenient order ; that of E. Havet (5th ed., bears the date 1897) ; that of Molinier, and that published during the past year in the series of “Les Grands Ecrivains Français.” The *Thoughts* have been excellently translated into English by Mr. Kegan Paul.

Any of these editions will show us the great importance of the *Thoughts* in the history of Christianity and

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\* V. Cousin, *Études sur Pascal*.

of religion. The method of defence adopted by Pascal was then unknown, however familiar we ourselves may be with its recent developments. It endeavours to establish the truth of Christianity by showing that it alone gives a satisfactory account of human nature.

In studying the *Thoughts* of Pascal we must keep ever in mind the nature of the book we are reading. We are in a position similar to that of the student of architecture when he endeavours to construct some vanished building from the scattered ruins of it which survive. Many of the fragments of stone-work which lie around are susceptible of various interpretations. What he is looking at may once have been a refectory, or a room in the abbot's house, or a part of the school buildings. Thus it is impossible to tell to what portion of the projected treatise many of these detached thoughts were intended by their author to belong. And in actual fact they are arranged under different titles by different editors.

We have, however, for their elucidation, one important statement which Etienne Périer informs us was made by Pascal himself to a small company of friends. Some two years before his death, being questioned upon the

plan of his contemplated treatise, he traced in outline the general course of his argument. ✓

The argument starts, not from proofs of the existence of the Deity, but from an enumeration of some of the surprising phenomena presented by human nature. The extraordinary contradictions observable in human beings are exhibited in a series of illustrations. Men are at some moments surprisingly noble, at other moments surprisingly base. The history of the race and of each of its members is made up of inconsistencies. The general colouring of the resulting picture is neither uninterruptedly sombre nor uninterruptedly bright. It is the strangest blending of these two opposite colours. Our wonder is that man being as good as he is should not be better, that being as bad as he is he should not be worse. How are these contradictions to be explained ?

The supposed inquirer first consults the philosophers, but finds that they all fix their attention upon one only of the two sets of phenomena that call for explanation. Some, like Epictetus and the Stoics, base their conception of human nature upon man as he is in his best moments, and thus make the exceptional virtue of a few favoured individuals the measure of attainment for the whole

race. While others, of whom Montaigne was for Pascal the representative, solve the difficult problem by treating the noblest human aspirations as illusions, discrediting the reason, and recommending us to desist from what is plainly beyond us, and, in Voltaire's famous phrase, "Cultivate our garden."

Disappointed with the philosophers, the inquirer next turns to the various religions of mankind, but finds none of them worthy of serious attention until he reaches that of the Jews. In the sacred book of this nation he finds for the first time a plausible account of the contrarieties which have hitherto baffled him. Here he learns that man was originally created in his Maker's image, but by his own choice involved himself in ruin and misery. His original character, however, the book assures him, has not been entirely effaced, nor has he been left by his Maker without the opportunity of recovery. Such an opportunity has been offered to him in a great Deliverer, and it has been embraced by a limited section of mankind.

There is no need to dwell further upon the later stages of the arguments, where Pascal endeavours to show that the view which thus at first sight commends itself to the



intelligence is really true. To establish this he appeals to the familiar attestations given by Jewish prophecy and by miracles, and here he is not beyond his age. His observations upon the books of Moses and the miracles of the Old and New Testaments are like many pages in the earlier geographers or physicians, and have become, as we say, out of date.

The explanation, however, of the facts of human nature which approved itself to Pascal must not be confounded with his reflections upon prophecy and miracles. This explanation seemed to a great writer of our own, distinguished by gifts not unlike Pascal's, to be the only one possible.

“To consider the world in its length and breadth,” wrote Newman in 1864, “its various history, the many races of men, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts; the tokens, so faint and broken, of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers and truths . . . the greatness and littleness

of man, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin . . . . all this is a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflicts upon the mind a sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution.

“What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence. Did I see a boy of good make and mind, with the tokens upon him of a refined nature, cast upon the world without provision, unable to say whence he came, his birthplace or family connections, I should conclude that there was some mystery connected with his history, or that he was one of whom, from one cause or another, his parents were ashamed. Thus only should I be able to account for the contrast between the promise and the condition of his being. And so I argue about the world; if there be a God—since there is a God—the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the

doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, or as the existence of God.”\*

This assurance regarding the existence of what is here called original sin would, I suppose, be shared by all moralists. They might use a different terminology, but they would not dispute the fact. That there are inherited forces within us swaying us towards evil, would not be denied by any accredited teacher. It was indeed denied by Rousseau in the famous treatise on education in which he attempted to trace all the evils of the human lot to our own interference with the course of nature. The commentary on this theory, however, supplied by the French Revolution was, we may believe, too striking ever to be forgotten. We know that passion is ever at work, striving to pervert the judgment, and to make our best impulses the instruments of mischief.

It is not the fact of original sin, but the inference from it to a terrible aboriginal calamity which has been made uncertain by the advance of knowledge since Pascal's time. We do not find that the most conservative theologians now represent the fall of man as anything

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\* Newman, *Apologia*.

more than the first wrong choice made by a creature who may have stood on a very low rung of the ladder of life. We do not feel that the early narratives of Genesis warrant us in speaking with much confidence about the beginnings of human life upon the earth. It may be that man is being slowly transformed from a savage or even from a brute into a spiritual being, as S. Paul seems to argue in his famous chapter : " That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural ; then that which is spiritual."

The existence of the double nature in man is of much greater moment than the ultimate explanation of it which may be beyond our reach. The brute has not been entirely extinguished even in the noblest members of the race. You see it reappearing on battlefields and at shipwrecks, at gaming-tables and on racecourses ; and yet on the very same field your eyes will be arrested and your heart touched by the noblest heroism and the most complete self-surrender. However the inconsistencies came to be, there they are. There is an earthly and there is a divine element in human nature, and it is their warfare which gives rise to the bewildering phenomena upon which Pascal dwells.

Let us listen to him as he brings some of the phenomena before us :—

*We rightly respect the human spirit because it is the superior and divine part of our being. But into what follies and extravagances do we allow this respect to lead us !*

*We are not content with the life we have in ourselves and in our own being : we wish to live an imaginary life in the idea of others, and to this end we strive to make a show. We labour incessantly to embellish and preserve this imaginary being, and we neglect the true. . . . It is a great mark of the nothingness of our own being that we are not satisfied with the one without the other, and that we often renounce one for the other. (p. 59. Kegan Paul.)*

*Vanity is so anchored in the heart of man that a soldier, a camp-follower, a cook, a porter, makes his boasts, and is for having his admirers : even philosophers wish for them. Those who write against it yet desire the glory of having written well : I who write this have, may be, this desire, and perhaps those who will read it.*

Again, how strangely does our pursuit of happiness belie our professed beliefs on the subject ! We profess

to believe that the seat of happiness is within : that external things have no absolute influence upon happiness : that our minds can on the contrary transform external things, and make a hell of heaven and a heaven of hell. Our duty thus is to make ourselves masters of that inner world which we can control, since the world outside is obviously not within our power. We should retire within ourselves and there seek that happiness which has been admirably defined as interest in the midst of tranquillity. Our conduct is, however, one continual protest against this supposition.

*Nothing is so insupportable to man as to be completely at rest, without passion, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his loneliness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. At once, from the depth of his soul, will arise weariness, gloom, sadness, vexation, disappointment, despair. Were our condition truly happy, we need not turn our minds from it in order to be happy.*

*A little matter consoles us because a little matter afflicts us.*

*Strife alone pleases us, and not the victory. We like to see beasts fighting, not the victor furious over the vanquished.*

*We wish only to see the victorious end, and as soon as it comes we are surfeited. It is the same in play and in the search for truth. In all disputes we like to see the clash of opinions, but care not at all to contemplate truth when found. If we are to see truth with pleasure, we must see it arise out of conflict.*

*A man passes his life without weariness in playing every day for a small stake. Give him each morning, on condition he does not play, the money he might possibly win, and you make him miserable. It will be said perhaps that he seeks the amusement of play, and not the winnings. Make him then play for nothing, he will find no excitement in it, and will soon be wearied. Mere diversion then is not his pursuit: a languid and passionless amusement will weary him. He must grow warm in it, and cheat himself by thinking that he is made happy by gaining what he would despise if it were given him not to play.*

*Take heed to this. What is it to be superintendent, chancellor, first president, but to be in a condition wherein from early morning a vast number of persons flock in from every side so as not to leave them an hour in the day in which they can think of themselves? And if they are in disgrace and dismissed to their country houses, though*

*they want neither wealth nor retinue at need, they yet are miserable and desolate, because no one hinders them from thinking of themselves.*

Man is thus full of antitheses and contrarities.

*Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. It needs not that the whole universe should arise to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the universe to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which has slain him, because he knows that he dies. The universe knows nothing of this.*

*All our dignity, therefore, consists in thought. By this must we raise ourselves. . . . Then let us make it our study to think well, for this is the starting-point of morals.*

*The greatness of man is so evident that it is even proved by his littleness. . . . For what man ever was unhappy at not being a king save a discrowned king. . . . No man was ever grieved at not having three eyes, but any man is inconsolable if he have none.*

*We are fools if we rest content with the society of those like ourselves : miserable as we are, powerless as we are,*



*they will not aid us. We shall die alone. (On mourra seul.) The last act is tragic, how pleasantly soever the play may have run through the others.*

Having exhibited these inconsistencies, it was Pascal's intention to show how they were dealt with by the philosophers. Upon this part of his proposed work the surviving notes throw but little light. Prefixed, however, to the *Thoughts* in many recent editions may be found an important conversation on philosophy between Pascal and one of the recluses of Port Royal. Pascal here takes the two writers who represented in his mind the two schools, to one or other of which all philosophers belonged, and subjects them to a very penetrating criticism.

"Epictetus," he said to his interlocutor, "is among the philosophers of the world he who has best known the duty of man. He wishes that man should above all things look upon God as his supreme object : that he should be persuaded that He governs all things with justice : that he should submit himself to Him with all his heart, and that he should follow Him willingly in everything, acting only with the greatest wisdom. This

disposition will check all complaints and murmurs, and will prepare the spirit to suffer resignedly experiences the most painful. Epictetus," he continued, "wishes that a man should be humble, that he should hide his good resolutions and fulfil them in secret; nothing ruins them more than to display them. He never wearies of repeating that man's whole study and desire should be to discern the will of God and to follow it."

This exalted morality seemed to Pascal to be vitiated by one serious defect. Epictetus, he said, would have deserved to be worshipped had he known man's weakness as well as he knew his strength. He assumed that man was capable of discharging his obligations towards God, that such fulfilment was within his power, that it was possible for him to cure himself of every vice and acquire every virtue, and so make himself the companion of God. Thus the Stoic appeal was essentially addressed to human pride. It was a call to man to put forth his strength and win the virtue which was always within his reach.

Montaigne, on the other hand, although he had been born in a Christian State, and was a member of the Catholic Church, represented to Pascal those—a large

class in every age—who, having convinced themselves that the deepest questions are incapable of a positive answer, turn away from them to a life of refined, amiable even beneficent worldliness. This philosophy is well typified by Montaigne's motto and device, which consisted of a pair of scales in perfect equilibrium, and underneath the words, "*Que sais-je?*"

Thus the two great systems, to one or other of which every human philosophy seemed to Pascal to belong, had each its fatal flaw. The one stimulated the growth of the deadly vice of pride, while the other, by discrediting and discouraging every attempt to reach the heavens, whether on the wings of thought or aspiration, condemned men to a contented and cowardly evasion of their highest responsibilities.

From both of these defects the Christian character appeared to Pascal to be free, inasmuch as it resulted from a recognition both of a man's strength and his weakness. The Christian is saved from pride by the sense of sin—his own and that of others. He is roused from the selfish lethargy of worldliness by the inspiring call to die and rise with Christ, and ascend with Him into the heavens.

It is hard to see wherein the lapse of two and a half centuries has deprived this argument of its essential force. If the distinguishing feature of the human lot be found in the contradictions where Pascal sought it, the faith which fully allows for these contradictions must be held to possess in this the strongest mark of truth. Not only are they formally recognized by Christianity, they enter into its inmost texture, and show that they do so by issuing in a character which, like the facts determining it, is complex and many-sided, and could only be described by one of its greatest representatives in terms of which each seems in succession to undo the effect of its predecessor : “ dying, and behold we live,” “ chastened, and not killed,” “ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” “ poor, yet making many rich,” “ having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

Here we see a much more than verbal recognition of the contrarities which riveted the attention of Pascal. They are expressed in an experience which is as contradictory as they are themselves. Thus while we may hesitate to follow Pascal in tracing the inconsistencies back to a primæval calamity, we may yet find in the treatment of them by Christianity an irresistible evidence

of its truth. It is the conspicuous representatives of Christian virtue who have returned, not in word, but in deed and experience, the most adequate answer to the question pressed home upon us by the *Thoughts of Pascal*.

Realizing this, the devout spirit may make his cry of gratitude its own, and say with him :—

“ Therefore I stretch forth my arms to my Deliverer, who, after having been foretold for four thousand years, hath come at last to suffer and to die for me . . . . and by His grace I wait for death in peace, in the hope of being united to Him for ever ; and I live meanwhile rejoicing, whether in the good things which it pleaseth Him to give me, or in the evils which He sends me for my good, and which He has taught me to endure by His example.”

J. BAKER & SON,  
CLIFTON.













